

The
Melville Society
N E W S L E T T E R

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With deep regret we report the death in January of Stanley T. Williams (Yale University), a charter member of the Society. Friend of all students interested in Melville and a Melville scholar in his own right, Professor Williams had the distinction of sponsoring more doctoral studies on Melville than any other professor. His death is a loss not only to the Society but to American scholarship in general.

THE "SPEKSNYDER" IN MOBY-DICK

The word "speksnyder" in Chapter XXXIII of *Moby-Dick* (printed, no doubt, as Melville wrote it) represents a misspelling. The correct form of this Dutch compound is "speksnyder" or "speksnijder," the *y* being interchangeable with *ij*. If Melville knew the Dutch components, as he suggests ("Literally this word means Fat-Cutter"), the wrong form in the chapter title and text could be the error of his copyist or printer. More likely, however, he was repeating the error of one of his chief whaling authorities, William Scoresby, author of *An Account of the Arctic Regions*. (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1820. E. K. Chesterton, perhaps also following Scoresby, uses the same incorrect form in *Whalers and Whaling*, Philadelphia, 1926, p. 132.)

Although Scoresby commonly uses the English form, "speksioneer" (for the probable derivation, see the *N. E. D.* and J. F. Bense, *A Dictionary of the Low-Dutch Element in the English Vocabulary*, The Hague, 1939), his first reference is to the whaling officer "called by the Dutch *Speksnyder*, or cutter of the fat, as his name implies" (II, 39). The proper Dutch form, on the other hand, appears in Scoresby's principal sources: (1) Dirk de Jong, *Nieuwe Beschryving der Walvisvangst en Haringvischery* (Amsterdam, 1791); (2) Bernard de Reste, *Histoire des Peches, des Découvertes et des Établissements des Hollandais dans les Mers du Nord*. . . (Paris, 1791), a translation of de Jong; and (3) C. G. Zorgdrager, *Bloevende Opkomst der Aloude en Hedendaagsche Groenlandsche Visschery*. . . (Amsterdam, 1720). But Zorgdrager's book, which Scoresby draws upon heavily and calls "the best that has appeared in any language" (I, viii), is printed in Gothic type. A reader not very familiar with Dutch or with the older

type face could easily confuse the minims in "speksnyder" and transpose *y* and *n*. The error, probably originated by Scoresby or his copyist, seems to have been copied and perpetuated by Melville in *Moby-Dick*.

—Leon T. Dickinson

SOME TRANSLATIONS OF MELVILLE

Stephen A. Larrabee sends the following information regarding translations of Melville's works which he encountered recently while teaching at the University of Helsinki and traveling elsewhere in Europe:

"In Finland I acquired a copy of the Wilhelm Struver translation of *Moby-Dick*, Berlin, 1927. It is one of the series, *Romane der Welt*, edited by Thomas Mann and H. G. Scheffauer for Th. Knaur Nachf. Verlag, Berlin W 50. The series also includes *Taipi*, translated by Karl Federn, and *Omu* (same translator).

"Two translations of *Moby-Dick* (or parts of it) have appeared in Finnish. In 1928 one was published at Helsinki, a translation by Arvi Nuormaa apparently from the German of Struver. The other translation, by S. Eino Auer, appeared in 1929 at Jyväskylä. A new translation by a young Finnish poet has been scheduled for publication before long. I found a copy of the Nuormaa translation entitled *Valkoinen Valas* ("The White Whale"). From the cards in the university library (which serves as the National Library) I gather that the Jyväskylä translation also appeared in a young people's edition. Several Swedish translations of Melville have been issued in Finland. *Redburn*, for example, was published in the Swedish language in Helsinki (Helsingfors) in 1950 by E. R. Gummerus.

"In Stockholm I was told I could not hope to find the *Moby Dick eller Den Vita Valen*, translated by Hugo Hultenberg (Ljus, Stockholm, 1943), but I surprised one dealer by locating a copy in his cellar stock. This translation seems complete (677 pages), and it has a foreword of two and a half pages. The back cover advertised a Swedish translation of Giono's *Pour Saluer Melville* (Fallet Melville). I also found an abridgement of the Hultenberg translation for young people (Ljus, Stockholm, 1944).

"In Venice on my first try I found the

1953 printing of the Cesare Pavese translation of *Moby-Dick*. An advertising leaf listed these printings: I edizione 1932, I ristampa 1941, II ristampa 1942, III ristampa 1950, IV ristampa 1953. The last is in one volume, while the first edition displayed at the Princeton centennial exhibition (No. 156) was in two volumes.

"En route to Greece last winter, I discovered two more *Moby-Dicks* — both apparently just off the presses — in Belgrade. One was *Mobi Dik*, a Serbian translation by M. S. Nedic (Izdavocko Preduzece "Rad," Beograd, 1954). This volume has 660 pages and includes a photograph of "Melvil" and a six-page preface by Miodrag Maksimovic. The other was *Moby Dick ili Bijeli Kit*, a Croatian translation by Zlatko Gorjan and Josip Tabak (Kultura, Zagreb, 1954). This has 547 pages, with a sketch of Melville's life (11 pp.) by Leon Howard.

"Of the other Melville items, the Norwegian *Tai-pi* (J. W. Cappelen's Forlag, Oslo, 1941), translated by Waldemar Brogger, and the German *Die verzauberten Inseln* (R. Piper, Munich, 1947), translated by Karl Hellwig, may not be very common."

NOTES

The American Tradition in Literature, 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1956), edited by Sculley Bradley and others, is advertised as containing (in Vol. I) "the only truly accurate edition available anywhere" of *Billy Budd*.

William Gilman and Merrell R. Davis expect their edition of Melville's letters to be published by the Yale University Press during the fall, possibly in August or September.

The Cycle of American Literature, by Robert E. Spiller, has recently been published by the Macmillan Company. \$4.75.

John Huston is reported to have decided at the age of 21, upon first reading *Moby-Dick*, that he would some day make the book into a motion picture. His film, recently completed at a cost of some four million dollars, has been scheduled for release during the spring or early summer.

Query: The secretary has seen two first editions of *Mardi* (New York, 2 vols.) with Volume I bound in somewhat lighter brown cloth than Volume

II. Recently he noticed such an unmatched set advertised in a book catalogue. Is it possible that these were not, after all, unmatched volumes but actually published in this condition — that is, with a darker brown binding for the second volume?

A rebroadcast of the "NBC Star Playhouse" version of *Moby-Dick*, with Fredric March as a rather dyspeptic Ahab (adaptation by Ernest Kinoy), was carried by transcription on the Radio Theatre program over many NBC radio stations Tuesday, November 15.

Harrison Hayford is to be thanked for very authentic-looking copies of "Billy in the Darbies" (with an original scratchboard drawing by W. B. Scott) which were sent to all members in December. At last report additional copies were available free upon request. Address Harrison Hayford, Department of English, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.

Previously mentioned but not formally reported in these pages: Publication by Harcourt, Brace & Co. of *The Inmost Leaf*, a collection of essays by Alfred Kazin. \$4.75.

Wilson L. Heflin gave a talk during the past summer at the whaling museum in Mystic, Conn. His *Melville's Whaling Years* is on the publishing schedule of the New York University Press.

Merton M. Sealts is completing a full-scale study of Melville's lectures and lecturing.

The University of Chicago Magazine for October (Vol. XLVIII, No. 1) published an article by Gordon Roper entitled "Before *Moby-Dick*" and including the "Toby correspondence" in full.

Howard P. Vincent is on leave from the Illinois Institute of Technology and is serving as director of the U. S. I. S. libraries in France. His office is at 41 Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré in Paris.

To be published May 7: *Ishmael*, by James Baird, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. About \$5.50. This is a study of genesis and form in the literary symbol referring to cultures of Oceania and the Orient.

As requested by members at the annual meeting, a list of members has been prepared and is enclosed with this issue. To those who have not paid their dues for 1956, your check is welcome!

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER

IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Membership is two dollars per year and includes all services of the Society. Associate membership (non-voting) is one dollar per year and includes all issues of the Newsletter. Address Tyrus Hillway, secretary, at Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado.